Morphosyntactic feature values in the penumbra: insights from the NUMERATIVE

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There are many well-known phenomena with a hybrid nature in morphology (for the traditional categories of parts of the speech); such as converbs or participles. Yet there is little literature about morphosyntactic phenomena between two feature values or "in the penumbra"; such as Bayso PLURAL, which shows properties of both GENDER and NUMBER (Corbett 2012: 199, 224-233).

In this paper, I focus on the NUMERATIVE in West Polesian (Eastern Slavonic, Belarus) in order to explore a morphosyntactic feature value in the penumbra. The NUMERATIVE is an inflectional form that nouns (or constituents of an NP) take when they appear in conjunction with a numeral (or quantifier). For example, in (1b) the morphophonologically dedicated NUMERATIVE form of the noun is prompted by the heading numeral; however, it cannot stand on its own to denote 'more than one/two/some tractors', as in (1c).

West Polesian

(1) a) **traxtoˈrɪ**
tractor.NOM.PL
'tractors'

b) dva **ˈtraxtorɪ**
two.NOM.M tractor.NUM
'two tractors'

c) * **ˈtraxtorɪ**
tractor.NUM
'two/some tractors'

The NUMERATIVE has only been documented in a few other Indo-European languages, including Welsh (Nurmio et al. 2016) and Sogdian (Sims-Williams 1979); but for the vast majority, it is only available for a handful of nouns. Conversely, data from recent fieldwork on West Polesian show that it has a robust NUMERATIVE. Thus, I use this data to explore further on its morphosyntactic nature.

The NUMERATIVE displays properties of both NUMBER and CASE values, but none of them clearly. On the one hand, the NUMERATIVE is like a NUMBER value due to its etymology (an eroded DUAL); its close relation to quantification/individuation (semantically); and the fact that it is in complementary distribution with DIRECT CASES. On the other hand, it behaves as a CASE value given that it marks a syntactic relation between a head (numeral) and a target (noun). However, CASE values in West Polesian can only mark one function and the NUMERATIVE marks both quantification and DIRECT CASES. According to the expectations that Corbett (2012: 199) and Numio et al. (2016: 297) extract, morphosyntactic feature values in the penumbra are diachronically unstable; i.e. their fate is to eventually become integrated into one feature value or another. Nevertheless, data from West Polesian NUMERATIVE reveal that it has managed to survive in the penumbra for centuries. I use this to advocate for the need of a new taxonomy that pays attention to and will be able to map those morphosyntactic feature values which escape the binaries.

References

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